

**IOWA CONFERENCE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING  
October 24, 2009**

Members Present: Lof, Darmour-Paul, Vass, Howie, Noer, Guffey-Lewis, Love,  
Douglas, Altenbaumer, Fisher, Stonebraker, Whiteman, Sargent

Absent (with prior notice): Hanon, Nelson, Wohlhuter

Absent (without prior notice): Boege

Also Present: CM Pleva, ACM's Jensen, Havelka, Stoik, Tammy Ebensberger

The Board of Directors met at Plymouth Congregational UCC in Des Moines. The Chair, Laura Lof, called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m.

**Election of Tammy Ebensberger to the Board of Directors**

**BOD 2009-27.** Fisher/Noer to elect Tammy Ebensberger to the Board of Directors. Approved unanimously.

The Board members and staff introduced themselves to Ms. Ebensberger.

CM Pleva led the Board in period of bible study, using Mark 10:17-31 as the text, and in opening prayer.

**Approval of Minutes**

**BOD 2009-28.** Noer/Vass to approve the minutes of the Board of Directors' meeting of August 28-29, 2009 as presented. Approved unanimously.

The Chair declared the meeting in recess at 10:00 a.m. so that the Board teams could meet.

The meeting reconvened at 11:00 a.m.

**Action Items Presented by Board Teams**

1. Administrative Team

*a. Personnel Policies*

The Administrative Team presented the latest draft of the Personnel Policies to the Board, including the most recent changes proposed by Treasurer Hanon. The policies, with Mr. Hanon's suggested changes, have been approved by the Administrative Team.

**BOD 2009-29.** To approve the Personnel Policies as presented. Approved, with all voting

“Aye” except Noer, who voted “Nay”.

*b. Policy Prohibiting Sexual Exploitation and Harassment*

The Administrative Team presented the latest draft of the Policy Prohibiting Sexual Exploitation and Harassment. During discussion of the Policy, Board members proposed two changes:

- Sargent proposed that “safe church” training be changed to “approved safe church” training at the various places where that phrase or variants thereof is found.
- Vass proposed that the word “online” be deleted from the phrase “online ‘safe church’ training.”

Both of these changes were approved by the Administrative Team.

**BOD 2009-30.** To approve the Policy Prohibiting Sexual Exploitation and Harassment, as amended by the proposals of Sargent and Vass. Approved unanimously.

*c. 2010 Salary Recommendations*

CM Pleva presented his recommendations for the CM and ACM salaries for 2010. These recommendations have been approved by the Administrative Team.

**BOD 2009-31.** To approve the salary recommendations as proposed. Approved unanimously.

*d. 2010 Housing Allowances*

CM Pleva presented the housing allowance requests of the Program Staff for 2010 as follows:

1. CM Pleva-\$38,000
2. ACM Stoik-\$20,000
3. ACM Jensen-\$10,000
4. ACM Havelka-\$18,000

**BOD 2009-32.** To establish the 2010 housing allowances for the Program Staff in the amounts stated above. Approved unanimously.

*e. United Church Funds authorizing resolution*

**BOD 2009-33.** To adopt the following resolution:

**BE IT RESOLVED** that the Iowa Conference of the United Church of Christ hereby authorizes its Conference Minister and President, Rich Pleva, and its Treasurer,

Larry Hanon, to establish one or more investment accounts with United Church Funds in any of its Common Investment Funds presently in existence or established at a future date.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that any future transactions related to the Conference's investments with United Church Funds may be authorized by either the then-current Conference Minister and its Treasurer in whatever form required by United Church Funds.

Approved unanimously.

*f. Appointment of Iowa Conference representative to Mayflower Homes, Inc. Board of Directors*

**BOD 2009-34.** To appoint George Drake as the Iowa Conference representative to the Mayflower Homes, Inc. Board of Directors. Approved unanimously.

*g. Sabbatical Fund*

CM Pleva reported that Union Congregational United Church of Christ, of Reinbeck, Iowa has made a donation of \$2,000 to the Conference to support the development of conference leadership. The Administrative Team recommends that a fund be established to help defray the costs of sabbaticals for Conference program staff and that this donation be deposited in that fund.

**BOD 2009-35.** To approve the recommendation of the Administrative Team. Approved unanimously.

## 2. Financial Development Team

The Financial Development Team has completed its work on a Multi-year Stewardship Development Plan for Clergy, Local Churches, Associations and the Conference. It is the recommendation of the Financial Development Team that this Plan be approved.

**BOD 2009-36.** Whiteman/Sargent to approve the Multi-year Stewardship Development Plan for Clergy, Local Churches, Associations and the Conference as proposed. Approved, with all voting "Aye", except Vass, who voted "Nay".

## 3. Program and Planning Team

The Program and Planning Team recommends that the Women's Coordinating Committee be disbanded.

**BOD 2009-37.** Whiteman/Guffey-Lewis to disband the Women's Coordinating Committee and to express deep thanksgiving to the Committee for its ministry. Approved unanimously.

### **Conference Minister's Report**

CM Pleva presented the Conference Minister's report. A copy of the report is attached to these minutes.

### **Financial Report**

CM Pleva presented the Financial Statements for the period ending September 30, 2009. A review and discussion followed.

### **Next meeting**

The Chair announced that the next meeting of the Board of Directors will be held at Plymouth Congregational UCC in Des Moines on January 30, 2010 beginning at 9:30 a.m.

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 1:25 p.m.

---

Mary Stonebraker, Secretary

Iowa Conference, UCC  
Board of Directors Meeting  
Report of the Conference Minister  
23 October 2009

When a new bishop is elected in either the United Methodist Church or the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, that person is sent to “bishop’s school.” When a new conference minister is elected in the United Church of Christ, we seem to expect that he or she already knows everything necessary for the work. That’s ridiculous, of course, but the fact is, even though being a conference minister is work very much different from that of a local church pastor, our denomination provides the new conference minister no formal training.

I wonder sometimes whether this is an unintentional reflection of our tradition’s deep-seated ambivalence about leadership. One of the strands of our heritage – congregationalism – was and is deeply wary about the consequences of unbridled authority. In some measure, our nation’s system of government – one with formally established patterns of checks and balances – can be attributed to congregational influence.

Our forebears were right, of course, to be wary of authority run amok, but unfortunately, we haven’t always been very sophisticated in distinguishing between properly constituted leadership which operates within the bounds of accountability, faithfulness and integrity, and mere authoritarianism. For a long time I have suspected that one of the roots of our denomination’s long standing decline has been a depreciation of the essential role of quality leadership in institutional life.

Whether or not my historical analysis is justified, new conference ministers come to their work quite ill-prepared and without formal and often even informal structures of support and instruction. The learning curve is extraordinarily steep and we have few resources to assist our leaders in the climb!

I can no longer claim to be a “new” conference minister. In the 4 years since I have been here in Iowa, 18 of the 38 UCC conferences have experienced CM transition and two more are on the immediate horizon. It almost feels like a merry-go-round or perhaps a game of musical chairs.

With that somewhat dour piece of context-setting, I am pleased to report that one of my colleagues, Doug Anders of the South Central Conference has wrangled an invitation from the Lilly funded Faith and Leadership Initiative of Duke Divinity School to do a special program exclusively for relatively new United Church of Christ conference ministers. Even though I am a bit outside the suggested stipulation that the event be for those with less than 3 years experience, I am delighted to have been invited to participate. On November 30<sup>th</sup> I will head to Raleigh, NC, and spend two full days in learning and reflection about leadership in the middle judicatory. I sincerely hope that what I learn

will better equip me for leadership and service here in the Iowa Conference – a responsibility I work very hard to exercise responsibly and for which I often feel so inadequate.

--

There are a number of matters pertaining to our common work which bear comment. In no particularly order, please consider these:

- I have just completed annual reviews of two of our ACM's (Jonna and Nicole), and the three continuing members of the support staff. I am pleased to report that our two newest ACM's are off to a superb start. On the whole the support staff is doing well, though there were a few issues about role and authority I needed to stress and clarify. As you know, Judy Peterson has now been working as my assistant for over two months (on a 16 hour/week basis). Her learning curve has also been very steep, but she is bright, organized and will be a profound asset. She is currently working as a temp, but after the completion of 240 hours, she will transition to direct employ by the Iowa Conference.
- At our last meeting I mentioned a meeting between representatives of several of the conferences here in the West Central Region of the denomination about shared services and/or ministry. That conversation will continue and Tony Stoik will represent us at a meeting next Thursday in Sioux Falls. That meeting will focus largely on the possibility of shared services (financial services, information technology, communications, support for the clergy search and call process). We will keep you informed as this conversation unfolds. I also want you to know that I have initiated conversation with Mike Downs, the chief executive of the UCC Pension Boards about the possibility of contracting with the Pension Boards for provision of some of those same services. Some years ago (before I was a conference minister) Mike made a similar offer to the Council of Conference Ministers. That offer was apparently rebuffed. I am strongly of the opinion that most conferences are too small to do these "back room" functions as well as they could be done and that the willing availability and expertise of the Pension Boards should be embraced. Stay tuned.
- The time of my upcoming sabbatical approaches swiftly. I will be out of the office from March 1, 2010, through May 31, 2010. We will not know whether or not the Louisville Institute will fund my grant request until December 15 of this year. In the meantime, there are plans which must be made. I will attend to those plans, but I need to know to what extent you are willing to expend funds from conference reserves if the grant is NOT approved. Those potential costs come in two distinct categories: The expense of employing someone on a part-time, interim basis to function as conference minister, and (should you be so inclined), support for at least some of the expenses I expect to incur as a part of my sabbatical plan. You should know that I have spoken with Ron Eslinger about filling in a part time basis while I am gone, and he has expressed interest in taking on that role – assuming no health emergencies in his immediate family. I will keep you informed. Because I will miss our spring board meeting, you can also expect that I will bring at least a tentative 2011 budget to our January meeting.
- In a very different vein, I am very excited to report that I have entered into conversation with Plymouth UCC/Des Moines regarding a potential expansion of their Lilly funded

“Transition into Ministry” program which would bring pastoral residents to serve in several (2 to 3?) rural congregations with intensive support and mentoring structures for those rural church TiM pastors. This is only in the earliest stages of investigation, but this is a very exciting prospect. Again, I will keep you informed.

- It will be no surprise for you to hear that I continue to be very concerned about our long-term financial stability. While we are in no immediate jeopardy, OCWM receipts this year are likely to be down in a statistically significant way. Some of this may be due to the ongoing recession, but I suspect another part of it is due to the demographic decline our congregations. If the work we do is important (obviously I believe it is) then we must continue to think creatively and act resolutely to provide adequate funding for what we do. I’m pleased that the Board will consider a development policy at this meeting. One of the responsibilities of a board such as this one is to ensure the provision of financial resources adequate to the implementation of our mission. The Development policy is one step in that process. Your willingness to advocate effectively for OCWM in your own church and in others is another part of your role. Your own contributions set a powerful example of your commitment. The identification of and relationship building with individuals with the capacity and heart to understand the importance of the conference’s work is also important. Please know that I will continue to work hard to imagine effective ways to fund our work, but your active partnership is essential. Thank you.

Earlier this week I spend two days in St. Louis for the Board meeting of Eden Seminary. We had a joint meeting with the Board of the Deaconess Foundation in the context of their anticipated gift of approximately \$18 million to Eden. During our joint meeting, Dan Aleshire, Executive Director of the Association of Theological Schools spoke with us about the stressed existence of theological schools – particularly those in the progressive protestant tradition. He made a powerful case for the assertion that our entire culture is benefited when all the various religious perspectives of Christianity – Roman Catholic/Orthodox, Evangelical, and Progressive/Mainline – are healthy and robust. In fact, of course, progressive/mainline versions of Christianity are today represented by institutions which are often “at risk.” Conferences of the UCC are among those institutions, and they are also “at risk.” I continue to believe that the version of Christian faith which we have to offer – to our own people and to the society at large – is critically important. We are engaged in vitally important work. It’s sometimes easy to forget that in the crush of everyday life – and even when we gather in settings like this meeting, we sometimes get so immersed in the details of institutional life that we lose sight of our mission. God has called us to proclaim a vision of life that is radically inclusive, committed to justice and the common welfare, focused on the fundamental value of all, and (of all things!), joyful!

This is our calling! Let’s embrace that calling with diligence and dedication!